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ABSTRACT

It is difficult for an instructor to designate his philosophy in teaching composition when it is derived from a background in cultural studies at one school and from an "expressivist" program at another school. Furthermore, in naming his approach, he must take into account the influence of his feminist instructors as well as his own "spiritual" pedagogy, which he has been developing accidentally all along. Expressivism would seem to be the central term in his philosophy and yet at the hands of some practitioners it has become a double-edged sword, wounding some students to whom it is applied as a naive practice with poorly conceived narcissistic tasks, and likewise wounding theorists and teachers who choose to apply to themselves in a sort of rebounding backlash of poorly reasoned criticism. What links the triad of expressivism, cultural studies, and spiritual composition is the common assumption underlying all tenable education: namely that educators presume a reality, a world to be improved. All education is at base ethical. As it strives to smash notions of self-direction, even social constructivism asks the student to imagine a time when humankind can stand liberated of oppressive ideologies. Though starting from different assumptions, a spiritual pedagogy finds potential points of convergence with social constructivism when it asks how the individual connects with humanity as he or she negotiates certain material conditions which are not products of culture (physical laws, ecological environments and biology). (TB)

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# Thinking Expressivist, Cultural Studies and Spiritual Pedagogies (and Feminism) Together:The Search For a New Term

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## Thinking Expressivist, Cultural Studies and Spiritual Pedagogies (and Feminism) Together:The Search For a New Term

### Apology and Introduction

This is a personal exploration. As a teacher who studies theory, I find myself without a term that fairly applies to what I do in the classroom, a situation which makes me feel marginalized and anxious. I am looking for a name to call my own; and at the same time I am hoping to find one that also joins me in a community of like-minded folk -- with luck, the ones I already respect the most. Because this writing is at once inwardly personal and an attempt to join in a common conversation, I want to avoid the use of citations. I want to be talking about the things that interested people already know together, or at least can read together without having to defer to unknown authority. Of course, there will be authorities within the text, people whose thinking has influenced those of us in this conversation together; but if you are interested in this conversation, no doubt you know who they are already.

My teaching style has been developed under the effective influence of a cultural studies composition program at one school and what some would call an "expressivist" program at another. All along I also seem to have been almost accidentally creating something one could call "spiritual" pedagogy, a practice which generates speculations on the meaning of existence. (And there is a parenthetical term here, running throughout, as I find that most of my best teachers -- whether officially "Teachers" or not -- are feminist women.) I use these approaches toward roughly the same end, one each of them openly countenances in its own way -- empowering and liberating students by allowing them to claim a subject position within the various worlds of discourse in which they are implicated. I also use expressivist, cultural studies and spiritual

approaches because they each seem to have a power to produce explosive growth in the rhetorical sophistication and mechanical facility gained by some of my students, and so serve the broadest range of needs of composition classes well.

Unfortunately, though, each of these pedagogies standing alone do not reach their potential ends often enough to permit me to feel justified in relying on any one of them alone, and as I read the literature I notice that my experience here is widely shared. Things get in the way. In cultural studies approaches, the necessary critique of authority applies equally well to cultural studies teachers, whose oppressive power to compel performance is as inescapable as grade rosters. The cultural studies "hit list" of race, gender, sexual orientation, and colonialism may not be shared by people still most interested in "freeing" themselves from parents, administrators, teachers, bosses, or just the hard knocks of their individual lives. Meanwhile, any attempt to create a spiritual pedagogy can threaten to become an exercise in conversion or escapism unless teachers foster an awareness not only of the multiculturalism of spiritual views but also of the political roles of religion in the material world. In being required to make either kind of investigation, cultural or spiritual, students often face the unsatisfying strategic trichotomy of stubborn resistance, cynical role-playing, or genuine submission -- none of which add up to the liberatory ideal of taking a subject position in their own discourse.

To deal with these issues, I have found that I needed to complicate the issue of my own authority -- pointing it out, showing its real institutional position, revealing all of the difficulties of my assessment methods, writing with students and making my own mistakes in front of them, showing my inadequacy as the sort of classroom god they have been conditioned to expect, and just plain getting out of the way at times. Doing this honestly necessarily includes letting students decide what they want to write. Thus, though I came to it last, I have come to see

expressivist pedagogy as central to my heterodox practice. Because expressivism insists on the necessity of teaching from somewhere other than the center of the classroom, it becomes for me the only feasible theoretical center around which to build the construct of the Teacher who can lead useful cultural or spiritual investigations.

As much as I trust expressivist methods, though, I have also feared that unless an expressivist pedagogy is based on an understanding of the concerns of cultural studies and spiritual pedagogies it can become dangerously private and self-absorbed. I have seen students feel that they have been forced into hard choices between silent resistance and self-exposure, and at times their responses have nearly overwhelmed my strategy of de-centering myself by attempting to put me in the dead-center roles of therapist, guru, or parent. Had I not already managed to establish an environment which invited both the critique of authority and the quest for belief in something larger than the self, the personal writing I invited may have had nowhere to go but into realms of solipsism and narcissism, neither of them defensible subject positions in larger discourses either. My off-center Teacher is still in the classroom, still subject to being constructed in more traditional ways, still entangled in its institutional role. Thus, as I started using expressivist methods I was grateful to have learned ways of diverting this focus onto social or cosmological sources of authority and desire deeper than my own presence there before the students.

Further, though students do not see it at first, political and spiritual concerns motivate and underlie the personal ones they are most impelled to explore. Issues of social constructedness underlie their struggles with authority and misfortune, and their yearning to have these struggles come to mean something in a larger sense is intrinsic in their desire to struggle at all. There is a poignancy here which too many of the most well-known and profound theorists

seem constitutionally incapable of addressing. At bottom, those of us who live in the relative obscurity of ordinary classroom teaching know that we are not "subjects" by some trivial accident of culture or history, but by birth; we have been subjected to the necessity of death, and the necessity of social interaction to forestall death as long as we can. In this respect, we are no different from the earthworm that attempts to escape when we turn over its rock: to live is to be "subjected," whatever the epoch, the ideology, the myth, the *ecriture*. Writing pedagogies that come to terms with the particulars and the constants of living in the flesh as a social animal are the farthest thing from naive. Thus, full exploration of students' seemingly trivial and immediate concerns in class discussions, conferences and group work inevitably lead them to the more powerful issues cultural studies and spiritual teachers have in view as long as this natural result is not interrupted by some sort of theoretical, authoritarian over-kill. By starting its examination with issues raised by the students themselves the student-centered expressivist classroom has the potential to reach the ends of cultural studies and spiritual pedagogies without tripping over the central paradox of positioning the teacher as a "liberating authority."

To get back to my personal issue, though, I do not feel as if what I am doing is just a hodge-podge, just a bit of this and a bit of that. In using expressivism as my central base (and feminism as the underlying enabling viewpoint) but reaching out toward cultural studies and spiritual pedagogies for methods and attitudes, I feel as if I have quite accidentally found a center of something, something that I find a great many of my in-the-trenches colleagues finding for themselves as well: something that ought to have its own name.

**The Problem with "Expressivism"**

I suppose I could just call myself an expressivist and have it done with. Certainly, my assumption that I can write an article meriting publication from a subjective point of view would seem to betray me as such. Moreover, by my reading, a rich exploration of connectedness is what most of the "expressivist" theorists have been after all along, so that the term could describe my pedagogy quite accurately. But the term seems to have become a double-edged sword, wounding some students to whom it is applied as a naive practice with poorly conceived narcissistic tasks, and likewise wounding theorists and teachers who choose to apply it to themselves in a sort of rebounding backlash of poorly reasoned criticism. I certainly do not want such a term applied to me. All of which leads me to wonder if an articulated reading together of these variant practices I tend to conflate in my practice may not lead most centrally to the need for a new term. The thing I am looking for is the true center of a pedagogy which seems to me to be closer to "expressivism" than any other standard term, but which also seems to have little in common with "expressivism" as it is described in the mostly accusatory statements I have read about it in the most sophisticated of sources. Thus, the first step in trying to find a new term, a term that is a more fitting representational metaphor, will have to be making an attempt to view "expressivism" in relationship with whatever other pedagogical alternatives there are.

This eventually gets back to metaphysics, as everything still does from within our historical epoch -- a point that postmodern theories artfully fudge. Even the claim that epistemology is the most fundamental philosophical term is actually grounded in a metaphysics of relativity. That is, for epistemology to be, actually, a basic term in any current philosophical or quasi-philosophical discourse, reality cannot be seen as generated by anything external to discourse;

this is the metaphysics of absolute freedom, the claim that reality could be anything at all. On the other extreme, there is the idea that reality is perpetually governed by an abstract simplicity which has its ultimate reduction in the idea of God; this is the metaphysics of absolute determination, the master plan known in advance and true forever and for all. You and I and Derrida have all been born into subjection to the rule of these concepts and will not escape them before we die, so when we are teaching we will all just have to deal with them -- albeit not without some melancholy and grief over what might have been, some yearning for what may become. These two extremes of freedom and determination, of course, also represent the underlying ideologies of "culture" and of "spirit" at their most extreme and dogmatic; but in practice, their metaphysics get more complicated -- as metaphysics always does

Pedagogies other than expressivism -- and here I am going to over-simplify my other terms the way expressivism has itself been victimized -- tend to fall toward one or the other of these poles of imagined absolute freedom or imagined absolute determination. Current-traditionalists take the idea of determination very seriously; the universal rules are simple, known, articulable, and applicable by exercise of the will. "Classical" rhetoricians tend to hedge on the determined side of things, but allow that the problem is hard enough to solve that we need to look more deeply into the historical record to unravel the real rules and their real articulations from the popular mistakes. Now, there is not exactly a parallel on the other side, the freedom side, and I will get to why that might be. Epistemic theory depends on the idea of utter freedom, but tends to insist that as a consequence we must see ourselves as heavily socially determined -- and so takes seriously the task of undoing those determinations in the interest of ultimate freedom. Composition's cognitive theorists mostly seem to accept the social determination of reality as well (at least judging by the near absence of

"deterministic" brain study from their work), but also seem either disinterested in the dream of absolute freedom or despairing of ever reaching it. Instead, cognitivists tend to work toward accommodating us to the social determinations already out there. (Feminist composition theory, of course, is all over this map)

Now, the lack of perfect parallels on both sides of this dichotomy indicates to me that it is not a dichotomy at all. And sure enough, in the common parlance of traditional metaphysics there is a third position that is something other than merely a middle ground between epistemic nominalism and current-traditional idealism. That third position is realism, and it has always been the slipperiest position both to hold and to escape. At the most extreme, realists would say there is no use to philosophy at all -- reality is what it seems, always. In teaching circles, this would be a practice informed by little or no theory, used by a teacher who tries to replicate his or her own favorite writing experiences and results operationally. We can call this the unlabeled pedagogy -- something more common in creative writing circles than in composition any more. As we get to a more complicated realism, though, one that, like classical or cognitive theory, does not believe in metaphysical purity, we get to the three positions I am trying to bring together. Spiritual pedagogies will tend to be more idealistic, and cultural studies will tend toward nominalist relativism; but their more central ground is in a realist metaphysic of creative interpretation. These views are always forward moving. They are based on assumptions that there is more to life than what we have now -- better futures can be created, action in the world can create value. The Marxist idea of surplus value, the spiritual idea of grace, and the expressivist idea of coming into empowering voice are all made feasible by this same metaphysic of becoming, of a real reality that can be improved, or at least supplemented. Reality is real, from this position, but it is both regenerated and known through creative interpretations. As to the seeming paradox of

"realist" spiritual pedagogy, hold that thought for a bit -- just keep in mind for now that the key to its resolution is in the idea of spiritual pedagogy, a way of enhancing learning, and not in "spirituality" as an isolated term.

I want to take the opportunity here to make a sort of central aside. The whole idea of school is based on an assumption that enhanced learning improves reality. This provisional optimism is the one necessary condition both for the founding of educational institutions and the choice to attend them. Every teacher who works within such institutions essentially contracts to operate within this assumption of provisional faith. To do otherwise is to take money under false pretenses -- while to go along with it may be a sort of "true pretense." This pretense seems to me to be inherently a mostly realist one, within which the triad of expressivism, cultural studies and spiritual composition pedagogies may represent something of the ethical limits of realism, nominalism and idealism. Personally, I simply cannot fathom the point of using academic positions as economic or political bases from which to challenge the realist pretense, which strikes me as something like agreeing to play Monopoly and then complaining that the properties are only imaginary. Neither can I imagine participating in the pretense with no real faith in its possibilities, whether out of lack of any faith in students' ability to learn "the truth" or out of disbelief that there is any truth. There are certainly easier and more internally consistent ways for intelligent curmudgeons and cynics to earn a living.

Now, although espressivism is easily seen as the central point within this realist, creatively interpretive position -- most simply because spiritual and cultural studies pedagogies tend to slip off toward the other positions -- there is, of course, something of a logical error in calling one point of a triangle "central." And it does seem to me that the ultimate point of pedagogical convergence in composition is something other than either expressivism or

philosophical realism. But the state of composition theory at this time, and indeed the state of all Western thought at least since Descartes (or even since Thales) is such as to make freedom and determination seem like the ruling dichotomy, the only axis which matters -- from which perspective realist creative interpretation seems to be merely a mushy territory in the middle. Perhaps this is why the powerful works of Kenneth Burke, Susanne Langer and Charles Peirce, all of which focus precisely on this issue of creative interpretation, tend to be rather curiously under-used by most composition theorists even while earning regular mention and praise. They just do not fit into the normal, dualistic debates.

Thus it is essential that this discussion depart from the popular configuration of objective positivism and subjective mysticism as the dichotomous poles which an interpretive epistemicism mediates. The fundamental problem with that configuration is that it utterly misrepresents expressivism as based on idealism, in part by forgetting that both objectivism and subjectivism are universal terms at the level of thinking about reality itself. There is an idealist subjectivism, an internal search for transcendent truths; but there can also be nominalist subjectivism (better known as solipsism) and realist subjectivism, a use of the subject position -- however configured -- as a point of departure for figuring out what a life is for, anyway. Put simply, if the concepts of agency, of ethics, of creation, have any validity at all, then all pedagogies aim at giving writing "subjects" control of their "own" writing; and if these concepts have no validity, there is no point in having a pedagogy at all. Again, at the limits of philosophy we may be wrong, but we are stuck. Realism, then, I would not claim as the "right" metaphysic, but as the perspective which allows us, at this time, to see what we need to do next.

Could I be so bold, then, as to declare that the new term I want is "realism"? Probably not. While the privileging of subjective experience is implicitly a product of a primarily realist ontology, in practice things get more complicated again. In the first place, since "realism," is the hidden term in our dualistic debates, its manifestations have generally been recast as either naively idealist or naively nominalist depending on the direction from which they are attacked. As a result, few in our neck of the woods want to claim being a "realist," at least not in print. Thus, "realism" offers no real strategic advantage over "expressivism." Beyond that, though, "realist" is not really a more accurate term than "expressivist" for the new, convergent pedagogy I am trying to describe. What would characterize such a convergent pedagogy more than anything is still a commitment to the use of writing from personal experience, the very "expressing" that gives "expressivism" its name and its usefulness.

So unless I am just going to fall back into the label "expressivism" and suffer the consequences, here at last I do need to depart from being and get into knowing; and here I must confront the central tactical weakness of expressivist theory, the fact that typically it offers no explanation of its own about knowing. If subjects are "pressing out discourse from within," there has to some means by which it got there in the first place. Rounding up the usual suspects, it seems that expressivism viewed as a collective entity knows that subjects express, but eschews any unifying explanation of the several ambiguities in the concept of expressing. Now, I find little evidence that expressivists think this process is at all mystical or idealist, an interpretation made by outsiders who misinterpret the reason for the absence of a single explanation of knowing within expressivism. Instead, central to expressivist theory seems to be the concept that individual students have unique ways of knowing -- that the epistemological is the personal. But in this generality we reach something of a dead end in expressivist theory, an

end which a new, central term cannot afford to leave closed off. It is precisely here that I have to take alternate routes into other pedagogical theories to figure out what name I can claim for my own.

**Cultural and Spiritual Knowing**

It may seem as if I must intend by the word "and" in this subtitle that I will address one idea of knowing and then another; but while this will be the practical result, my central concept in this section is that these seemingly dichotomous ways of knowing are continual with each other and that it is useful to think of them this way. What I want to claim here is that epistemologies are all religions at some point, and religions all epistemologies. The claim to know from where knowledge comes *or does not come* is always already theological. "Epistemic" pedagogy claims to know that whatever is being expressed is entirely socially constructed. Everything comes from culture and returns to culture -- ashes to ashes and dust to dust, to use a well-known, loaded metaphor. The work of the subject in cultural studies seems primarily to be to realize this, and to recant all prideful claims of being self-directed. This awakening, though, is also thought to have an ethical dimension, empowering one to see the truer will of society, which becomes ethical only by virtue of an underlying faith that this underlying will of society is benevolent, desiring an end to oppression in all of its forms. The cultural studies student is asked to dream of a day when all humankind may say "free at last, free at last, . . . well, free at last." Seeing the theological parallels requires no real strain at all. It is the theology of pantheism, one step removed. The cultural studies universe is good without the will of God, meaning that socially constructed knowledge as a whole is good, meaning that the existence of evil and error is either a product of individual error -- particularly the error of believing oneself to be an individual -- writ large, or it is a temporary stage in

historical processes which will turn out well someday if we work at it. Such a theistic portrayal of materialist atheism is necessary, since otherwise the only point of a cultural studies pedagogy would be to make people more aware of their inevitable misery, which does not mesh with the ethical self-image of the pedagogy. Within the cultural studies cosmology, then, the subject is *improved* by understanding the nature of individual constructedness, by placing the self consciously in the flow of the constructedness itself; and this in turn improves reality as a whole. This coming to cultural enlightenment is inevitably an interpretive process, since one must read both oneself and culture more richly than before. It is also inherently a creative process, since the ethic of creating a better world depends upon the possibility of generating a larger store of goodness in the culture as a whole than it currently possesses. Hence, the epistemology of cultural studies begins with complexity and yet inevitably converges around a potent, central, (a)theistic faith that a better reality can be created through better interpretive processes.

The epistemology of a spiritual pedagogy, by contrast, starts with a convergence around the ultimate sort of God-term, but must complicate itself to have anything to do. That is, if spiritual pedagogy were to encourage mere sermonizing, a mere telling of beliefs already held, it would have little place in this discussion or in the "true pretense" of growth in which school is entirely engaged. Though it is hard to make claims like this about something that has only a vague and shadowy sort of institutional existence, the spiritual pedagogy which I hear described in various composition conference papers is almost invariably about searching, about writing as a path for pursuing a deeper spirituality. This is precisely how students in my own classes have used such an approach within the framework of my request that they write about whatever they most wish to pursue further in writing. The "in writing" part here seems to have a useful

effect; rather than coming to focus on private, secret truths, writing toward spiritual goals with other readers in mind has a tendency to become a search for one's connections with humanity and with the universe -- a tendency which a dialogic pedagogy of any sort enhances. The potential parallel with cultural studies is rather striking if we can think of our identity as in part structured by all of those forces we encounter which are not products of culture (at least within a provisionally assumed realist belief system) -- things like physical laws, ecological environments and our own biology.

Even more interesting, then, is the connection between "spiritual" matters of God and cosmology and material factors such as the nature of our embodiment -- the aspect of inquiry which imbues spiritual pedagogies with realism in the first place, and promotes strategies of creative interpretation. After all, in order to explore one's position is in the universe, it becomes quite relevant and necessary to consider the physical form and material conditions in which one has entered it. "Why am I here?" becomes the more useful, intricate, and socially situated question "Why am I, with all of my characteristics, exactly here, with all of its characteristics. Certain issues -- such as homelessness -- can even foster a sort of combined cultural/spiritual investigation. To ask why there are homeless people in a wealthy nation can rarely be addressed in a satisfying manner without addressing both cultural forces and metaphysical ones.

What this all gets down to, then -- expressivist, cultural and spiritual investigations alike-- is a powerful set of questions which traditional first-year students in particular are already asking with a vengeance: "Who am I? Where am I going? Where do I belong? And why?" Frankly, I cannot imagine how anyone can address any part of that inquiry diligently without encountering a full range of personal, social and metaphysical discovery. It is all ultimately about connections. Human individuals know we are not alone, we know we are

communal and connected, we know we are environmentally and cosmologically located within very particular limits; we know this at a level even deeper than the one on which we provisionally assume unique identities within the cultural and metaphysical constructedness that generates individuality. The different points of reference are no more than the different ontological categories in more useful guise. Adjusting for the realist bias in the very idea of teaching writing at established institutions of learning, we can say that cultural nominalism, spiritual idealism, and individually embodied realism together make up the realm of the full inquiry into being. Apart, they are simply exaggerations of some portion of the investigation.

**The Need for Convergence**

And so I want to urge a number of convergences. First, I would like to see these very similar goals of cultural studies, spiritual, and expressivist pedagogies brought into a continuum together where each can interact and learn from the others. We are not stuck with the concept that the subject is isolated; subjectivity that is infinitely connected in larger scenes and aware of it is a common goal of all pedagogies of creative interpretation seen as such. Then, I would like to see this rich interpretive position draw in every other kind of writing teacher, in the process of which the true triangular nature of the relationships among freedom, determination, and interpretation would become more clear. Along the way, it makes sense to me to reach out first toward the more complicated practices of cognitivists and classical rhetoricians -- something that many so-called "expressivists" of the first rank have always done, of course.

But here I am dreaming ahead, and creative interpretation needs to work step-by-step. The first step, it seems to me, is for the rather new cultural studies and spiritual pedagogies to draw more freely on their older (at least as an express

writing pedagogy), broader, more central and more heterodox comrade, expressivism. The issues which seem to be the nagging but often peripheral concern of cultural and spiritual studies -- issues of classroom authority, of student resistance, conversion or indifference -- have long been the central concerns of expressivists. Meanwhile, the more central commitment to realism as the metaphysical ground, while arguably no more right or wrong than others, is best suited to the enterprise of teaching within formal institutions in the current intellectual climate. Neither the position that there is no truth nor the position that truth is known perfectly by authorities and must be obeyed perfectly are conducive to student enthusiasm of the liberatory kind. To say that there is truth, at least provisionally, but that it can only be approached through multifaceted creative interpretation is to say that there is good reason to work hard at writing and to work hard at the central issues of our lives -- our personal, social, and spiritual lives -- in writing. Indeed, I would submit, again, that whatever philosophy writing teachers claim, the mere fact that they do what they do indicates a rather strong faith in (or at least willingness to be complicit with a faith in) the power of creative interpretation to change worlds, to change lives, to change souls.

**Toward a New Term**

The term I should want, then, not only should be something that can catalyze convergence and realignment, it should be something that could adequately describe the new, unified field. In other words, it needs to shoot more for the center of the ontological triangle than the center of the current debate, but in a way that can leave the old subjective/objective dichotomy behind. All attempts at grounding this convergence seem to keep coming back to something about the physicality of the writer, the "subjection" to physical life. The social

sphere is shaped largely by the tensions among our competing desires. The individual sphere is shaped not only by the shared nature of our species' sensory apparatus, but also by our profound differences in physical temperament. I have even come to conclude, in trying to resolve these issues for myself, that spiritual searching (as opposed to spiritual certainty) is inevitably a physical issue. I will spare you the details of my own spirituality. Let us just say that after much fitful reading in biology, cognition, semiotics and physics not only does it seem quite ordinary to me that spiritual exploration has a physical component, our biologically driven compulsion toward sacred yearning also no longer strikes me as accidental.

What may be accidental, though, is this drive to find a central term, a god-term, in every scene. When I put the tag "The *Need* for Convergence" in my subtitle, I fully intended the ambiguity. If we can say that we need a convergence, we must also question what sort of need that is. Somehow, we subjected humans seem always to strive to find a way to include everything in one "map." Composition theorists have lately been seduced into seeing all issues of writing pedagogy as belonging on the map of "epistemology," even though as a matter of necessity all epistemological choices also imply metaphysical, ethical, and aesthetic choices not reducible to any epistemological base. This particular pursuit of an epistemological convergence has been largely responsible for turning the term "expressivist" into a dangerous one. We do not need simply another simplified convergence of that nature, not even at what seems to be the deeper level of metaphysics. And yet we also must notice that the process by which this current epistemological convergence has been derived is eminently rational on its face, even if at times unreasonable. It seems that we cannot hope to escape from irrational convergences merely by being rational.

I would propose, instead -- and conflating my approaches outrageously in so doing -- that a certain degree of chaotic irrationality and then a cooperative leap of faith is going to be needed to solve this puzzle of the need for a practical convergence and a new term. So I want to hold on to my continually surfacing intuition that ideas about writing need to converge around the embodiedness of students and teachers, of cultures and spirit. Both cultural studies and spiritual exploration are ultimately about reaching beyond the merely personal; they are about seeing the personal as a construct of larger forces; and yet the personal is inevitably, biologically, the center of seeing. Writing together with our students and among ourselves about our personal experiences of connections, about ourselves as bodies positioned by both cultures and cosmos, seems a most fruitful way to go about both theorizing and practicing. I also want to hold on to the idea of creative interpretation that unifies the realist pedagogies. Mixing these three carefully generated intuitions, then, and trying to imagine a body creatively interpreting itself in terms of its connections, first I get an image of cells replacing each other -- a fast-forward view of the process by which the interconnected systems of our bodies become entirely new at the biological level over roughly a seven-year period But the idea of connectedness leads outward beyond the body as well, into images of sexual reproduction -- intercourse, meiosis, pregnancy, birth, and nurturing -- of communication, of the forming of cultural institutions, of the vast, entirely interconnected sweep of the expanding, mutating universe. Generation. Generativity. Generationism. Generative writing pedagogy. "Generativist J. Smith writes . . . ."

I like it; but it sounds a bit like "gender," which gets me back, at last, to feminism (which I can finally take out of its parentheses). Am I just talking about feminist pedagogy written out onto an ungendered scene? After all, the featuring of connection, the tolerance of epistemological and/or ontological

differences within one viewpoint, the featuring of inquiry into identity, all remind me of the features of feminist pedagogy, features whose advantages in fostering creative interpretation I have continually used both in my classrooms and in my own learning. The politics of either claiming or not claiming the term "feminist" for what I have been describing overwhelm me, but simply on a practical level, at the level of getting teachers of all stripes to converge on a term, "feminism" has problems, too -- problems I am trying here, provisionally at least, to avoid. Perhaps this is simply a sign of the success of feminist scholarship and practice, that its productions have a profound value on a scale that exceeds the range of a gendered term. But I hope you will forgive me, at this juncture, for declaring that the limits of my own self-expression seem to have been reached. We do need a new term; but perhaps not today, not here, not from this admittedly personal search. Given where I have come out, it may well take a woman to complete the job. Again.